
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

What is Occupational Therapy

Occupational Therapy is the art and science of helping others to live life to its fullest! Practitioners of this profession are occupational therapists (OT) and occupational therapy assistants (OTA). OTs and OTAs work with individuals of any age to develop, recover or maintain the skills needed to participate in occupation (everyday activities) with meaning, satisfaction and productivity. Under the supervision of an occupational therapist, an assistant will develop and provide therapeutic activities and strategies that will help their clients gain the cognitive, physical, emotional and/or developmental skills necessary for everyday life. This may include providing adaptive equipment or techniques necessary to carry out life tasks, providing education and consultation to individuals, families and society, and addressing prevention. The OTA will work with the health care team which may include physicians, nurses, physical therapists, psychologists, social workers, and speech and language pathologists in a variety of settings including: hospitals, rehabilitation centers, school systems, community mental health centers, nursing homes, home health agencies and private practice.

What education do I need to become an Occupational Therapist or Assistant

Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants must complete an education program accredited by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education. Coursework of the American OT Association includes the physical, biological, and behavioral sciences and the application of occupational therapy theory and skills. High school courses to take include biology, chemistry, physics, English, health, and the social sciences. OTs must complete a Master's degree program from an accredited school, which includes six months of fulltime, supervised clinical training. OTAs must earn a two-year associate's degree, which includes 16 weeks of full-time, clinical training. After passing the national certification exam, the student may use the designation COTA (certified occupational therapy assistant).

Certification and Licensing

Several states require OTs to be licensed. To get licensed, applicants must have a degree from an accredited occupational therapy education program and pass a national certification exam given by the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy. Passing the exam earns the designation occupational therapist, registered (OTR) or certified occupational therapy assistant (COTA). Before granting admission, many professional education programs require experience as a volunteer or documented observation hours in an occupational therapy department of a hospital or clinic.

How is Occupational Therapy different than Physical Therapy

Occupational therapy focuses on a person's ability to participate in life skills such as dressing, cooking, going to school, working, resting, and things for fun. The occupational therapist helps the person regain or replace physical, cognitive, mental, communication and spiritual skills necessary for life tasks. Physical therapy is more focused on treating and preventing physical injury, movement and mobility. The physical therapist helps to diagnose and treat the physical source of the problem working extensively with anatomy, the musculoskeletal system and mobility. Although the professions are distinctively different there is some crossover between the two and they often work together as part of the rehabilitation team.

One OT student from UMN says it well: "A Physical Therapist will teach you how to walk. An Occupational Therapist will help you get a date and enjoy the dance." UNM Health Sciences at <http://hsc.unm.edu/som/ot/about/admissions/faq.shtml#other1>

What is the job outlook for Occupational Therapy Assistants

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, employment of occupational therapy assistants is expected to grow due to the increased demand for rehabilitation and long-term care services. Average starting salaries for OTAs in the United States are \$38,430 (2004). According to the 2007 Rhodes State College Graduate Survey of OTA graduates (who returned the survey) had an average starting salary of \$40,691.

What is the work environment for an Occupational Therapist or Assistant

Many occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants wear casual, comfortable clothing that allows them to work easily with their patients. In addition, OTs and OTAs typically work in an environment in medical, home, school, workplace and community settings.

What are the skills of an Occupational Therapist

Occupational therapists should have a good imagination to adapt activities to individual needs. Patience is another important asset. Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants must have strength, energy, patience, and a desire to help people. Excellent communication skills are also necessary for the occupational therapist and the occupational therapy assistant. These professionals must be able to interact with patients and families in a manner that provides the desired psychosocial support and teaches other health care providers, patients, and families to perform selected intervention procedures. The importance of communication skills for these professionals is also exhibited in their participation in discharge planning, documentation of relevant aspects of patient treatment, and promotion of effective interpersonal relationships.

How I apply to the OTA Program

Contact Heather Flanagan at 419-995-8189 OR Flanagan.j@rhodesstate.edu!

What qualifications will I need to be accepted into an Occupational Therapy Assistant Program

1. A composite ACT score of 21 or above with individual scores of 18 in English and social science and 20 in math and science or appropriate test scores/ developmental coursework.
2. Must have basic computer skills prior to admission to the program. This can be satisfied through high school experiences, life experiences, or completion of CPT-104 or equivalent.
3. A 2.5 grade point average in all previously completed college work based on a 4.0 scale.

Requirement 4 must be met by the time of enrollment in the first Occupational Therapy Assistant course.

4. Twenty hours (20) of documented work/volunteer experience in an Occupational Therapy department/office. (Form for documentation of this experience can be found on the OTA website)

Requirements 5, 6, and 7 must be met by the beginning of the second quarter of the program (prior to the beginning of supervised clinical practice.)

5. Satisfactory physical examination results from a physician to include specified laboratory tests and immunizations. Validation of this requirement must be received by the OTA Chairperson.
6. Current basic cardiopulmonary resuscitation qualifications from the American Heart Association (BLS, health Care Provider, CPR), American Red Cross (infant, child, and adult CPR; choking victim; AED), or American Safety & health Institute (Professional Level/AED)- must be maintained through graduation.
7. Completion of criminal background check (FBI and BCI&I) to meet the specifications of some clinical sites. It is each student's individual responsibility to have this report available to the clinical site when requested.

(Applicants who do not meet academic requirements may plan a program of study under the guidance of the Academic Advisor for Allied Health to prepare for possible admission to the program. Admission to this program is limited; therefore, it is advisable to submit application materials as soon as possible.)